

A
LETTER
TO
ANONYMUS,

In Answer to his

Three Letters
TO
D^r SHERLOCK
ABOUT
Church-Communion.

By D^r Sherlock.

L O N D O N :

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LETTER

ANONYMUS

Three Letters



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A
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TO
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In Answer to his Three LETTERS to
Dr. *SHERLOCK*, about
Church-Communion.

SIR,

I Am very sorry, that my Silence and Patience has been mistaken by you for an affront and neglect; which is such a Provocation, as I find some sort of great minds cannot bear.

But yet, that you may have a little mercy, I shall give you a brief account of the reason, why you had not an Answer before.

I did not answer your first Letter in so publick a manner as you desired, because I believed your Objections were such, as no body was concern'd in but your self, and I cannot think it decent, to trouble so numerous an Auditory with every particular mans conceits. I did not answer your second Letter, because by the Temper and Spirit of it, I easily foresaw, that it would end in a publick Quarrel; and if I must be in Print, I henceforth resolve to correct the Press my self, and not to suffer any man to print my private Letters for me. But yet I called at Mr. R's Shop, whither you directed me, several times, to have invited you to a private Conference, but could never see him, till I accidentally met him in the street, the same day I received the Present of your printed Letters. The reason why I printed

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those Discourses, which you heard me preach, was because they were designed for the Press, before they were designed for the Pulpit, and before I dreamt of your terrible Queries; and were printed and preach'd exactly by the same Copy, excepting the Introduction to fit them to a Text, which you know is very convenient for a Sermon. And the reason why I sent you one of those Tracts, when it was printed, was because I did hope you might have had understanding enough, upon a careful perusal of it, when it lay before you, to have answered those Objections which you made against it, at the first hearing.

And now, Sir, I come to consider the Contents of your First Letter; you have made some Repetition of what I discoursed, and a very good Repetition to be done by memory; which gives you the commendable Character of a diligent and attentive Hearer: but when you had the Discourse before you in Print, you ought not then to have depended upon your memory, but to have given me my own again in my own words and order, and with that dependance and connexion, in which the whole strength of that Discourse consists; and to have applied your Queries distinctly to those parts of the Discourse, which they related to. Had you done this, you would either have been able to have resolv'd your own Queries, or would more effectually have convinc'd me of my mistake, or at least have given your Readers better satisfaction in the pertinency of what you say; but now you have onely given us a heap of Queries, which it is no easie matter to know to what they relate.

As for your Repetitions, the Reader who desires satisfaction, may compare them with what I have writ, which is exactly the same with what I preach'd: and as for your Queries, you know how easie a thing it is to ask Questions. However, I will endeavour to find out to what they belong, and give as plain and short an Answer to them as I can: for I assure you, I am not at leisure now to write a long Book upon this Argument, and therefore it is a great comfort to me, that there is no need of it.

After your Repetition of what you could remember, or what you thought fit to take notice of in my Sermon, you give us a very mistaken Summary of it.

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To sum up (say you) what I take to be the force of all this.

The Apostles and their Successors, were by our Saviour invested with a power of receiving Members into his Church upon his Terms, and with such Rites as they should think fit; and they who are not

so

so received into the Church, have no right to any of the blessings promised to the Members of Christ's Body.

This Power is by an uninterrupted Succession, derived upon the Governors of our National Church, wherefore all others, that pretend to the exercise of this Power within this Nation, are Usurpers; and all the Laity Baptized by their Pastors, not being duly admitted into any particular Church, are so far from being Members of Christ's Body, that they are Usurpers and Traytors to that Power, which is derived from him in a right line. Durus hic Sermo.

Had you not told the World in your Title-Page, that you are a Lay-man, to make your Triumph over a poor undone Doctor of Divinity the more glorious, I should have taken you to be the Founder of some new Sect of Conjectural Divines; and truly you are so happy in your guesses, that I believe few men will ever be able to out-do you in this Art. For there is not one word of all this matter in that Discourse, which you pretend to sum up, as it was delivered by me. That to which you seem to refer, is contained in one short Paragraph, which I shall Transcribe, and leave the most fanciful Reader to try his skill to sum it up as you have done. Having before asserted, that *God only can Constitute a Church*, I added, *And I think it is as plain, that of Caste; the onely visible way God has of Forming a Church (for I do not now speak of the Invisible Operations of the Divine Spirit) is by granting a Church-Covenant, which is the Divine Charter whereon the Church is founded, and investing some persons with Power and Authority to receive others into this Covenant, according to the terms and conditions of the Covenant, and by such Covenant-Rites, and Forms of Admission, as he is pleased to Institute; which under the Gospel is Baptism, as under the Law it was Circumcision.*

I was discoursing of Gods visible way of Forming a Church, which I asserted to be by granting a Church-Covenant, which is that Divine Charter on which the Church is founded; but then, lest any one should question, how men are admitted into this Covenant, I added, that God had invested some Persons with Power and Authority to receive others into this Covenant by Baptism; and by receiving them into Covenant, they make them Members of that Church which is founded on this Covenant.

Now what of all this will any sober Dissenter deny? Here is no dispute who is invested with this Power, what Form of Church-Government Christ Instituted, whether Episcopal or Pres-

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Presbyterian ; here is no dispute about the validity of Orders, or Succession, or in what cases Baptism may be valid, which is not administered by a valid Authority : This did not concern my present Argument, which proceeds upon a quite different Hypothesis, viz. the necessity of Communion with the *one* Church and Body of Christ ; for all those who are, or would be owned to be Christians, or Members of Christs Body, I make no inquiry by whom they have been baptized, or whether they were rightly baptized or not : but taking all these things for granted, I inquire whether Baptism do not make us Church-Members ; whether it makes us Members of a Particular or Universal Church ; whether a Church-Member be not bound to Communion with the whole Catholick Church ; whether he that separates from any sound part of the Catholick Church, be not a Schismatick from the whole Church ; whether we be not bound to maintain constant Communion with that particular Church in which we live, and with which we can, when we please, communicate occasionally ; whether it be consistent with Catholick Communion, to communicate with two Churches, which are in a state of Separation from each other : If you have any thing to say to these matters, you shall have a fair hearing ; but all your Queries, which proceed upon a mistaken Hypothesis of your own, do not concern me ; and yet to oblige you, if it be possible, I shall briefly consider them.

1. Your first Query is, *Whether a Pious Dissenter supposed to be received into the Church by such as he believes to be fully invested with sufficient Power, is in as bad a condition as a Moral Heathen, or in a worse than a Papist.*

Answer. The Catholick Church has been so indulgent to Hereticks and Schismaticks, as to determine against the Necessity of Rebaptization, if they have been once, though irregularly baptized. This you may find a particular account of, in the Vindication of the Defence of Dr. Stillingfleet, p. 22. &c. But the question is, whether if they continue Schismaticks, whatever their other pretences to Piety be, their Condition be not as dangerous, as the Condition of Moral Heathens and Papists.

2. *Whether the Submission to the Power and Censures of this Church (which all must own to be a sound Church) be part of the Divine Covenant, which Unites the Members of the Catholick Church to God and to each other.*

Answer. This is a captious Question, which must be distinctly answered.

answered. A general Submission and Obedience to the Authority and Censures of the Church, though it cannot properly be called a part of that Divine Covenant whereon the Church is founded, which primarily respects the promise of Salvation by Christ through Faith in his Blood; yet it is a necessary Church-Duty, and essential to Church-Communion, and so may be called a part of the Covenant, if by the Covenant we understand all those Duties which are required of baptized Christians, and Members of the Church, by a Divine positive Law, as Obedience to Church-Governours is.

But then Obedience to the Church of *England* is not an universal Duty incumbent on all Christians, but onely on those which are, or ought to live, in Obedience to this particular Church: for the particular exercises of Church-Authority and Jurisdiction is confined within certain limits, as of necessity it must be; and though all *Orthodox* Churches must live in Communion with each other, yet no particular Church can pretend to any original Authority over another Church, or the Members of it, as is the constant Doctrine of Protestants, in opposition to the Usurpations of the Church of *Rome*. But I perceive, Sir, you know no difference between the Authority and Power, and the Communion of the Church.

But you adde, *If it be, then as he who is not admitted into this Church, is no Member of the Catholick, and has no right to the benefits of being a Member of Christs Body: so is it with every one, who is excluded by Church-Censures, though excommunicated for a slight Contempt or neglect, nay, for a wrongful cause.*

Truly, Sir, I know not how any man is admitted into the Church of *England*, any otherwise than as he is admitted into the whole Catholick Church, viz. by Baptism, which does not make us Members of any Particular Church, but of the Universal Church, which obliges us to communicate with that part of the Catholick Church wherein we live; and whoever lives in *England*, and renounces Communion with the Church of *England*, is a Schismatick from the Catholick Church.

And whoever is excommunicated from one sound part of the Catholick Church, is excommunicated from the whole. But then, there is this difference between Excommunication and Schism; the first is a Judicial Sentence, the second is a Mans own Choice; the first is not valid, unless it be inflicted for a just Cause; the second is always valid, and does in its own nature

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cut Men off from all Communion with Christs Body. I say in its own Nature, for I will not pretend to determine the final States of Men; for I know not what gracious allowances God will make for some Schismatics, no more than I do what favour he may allow to other Sinners.

But you proceed: *If it be no part of the Divine Covenant, then a man that lives here, may be a true Member of the Catholick Church, though he is not in Communion with this Sound Church.*

This is another Horn of your formidable Dilemma. If Obedience to the Authority and Censures of the particular National Church of *England* is no part of the Divine Covenant, then those baptized Christians who live in *England*, are not bound to the Communion of the Church of *England*, and may be Catholick Christians for all that. As if, because the Subjects of *Spain* are not bound to obey the King of *England*, therefore English men are not bound to obey him neither, but may be very good Subjects for all that.

We are bound by the Divine Law, to live in Communion with all true Catholick Churches, and to obey the Governours of the Church wherein we live; and therefore, though Obedience to the Church of *England* be not a Law to all the World, yet it is a Law to all English Christians inhabiting in this Church. But your way of arguing is, as if a man should say, It is a Divine Law to obey Civil Magistrates, but there is no Divine Law that all the World should obey the King of *England*, *France*, or *Spain*, therefore French or English Subjects are not bound to obey their own Prince. Oh what comfortable Doctrine is this to some men!

You proceed: *But you will say (which I think is not much to the question) that he ought to Communicate, if Communion may be had.*

Yes, I do say this; and I believe by this time you see, or at least others will see, that it is much to the question.

But then Query, *whether the Dissenters may not rely, that they are ready to Communicate, if the Communion be not clog'd with some things, which are no part of the Divine Covenant.*

Yes, they may reply so, if they please, or *Anonymus* for them; but whoever does it, the reply is very weak and impertinent. It is weak, because Obedience to Authority, in all lawful things, is in a large notion part of the Divine Covenant: And it is very impertinent, because the Supposition of Communicating, where
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Communion may be had, supercedes that Query. For Communion cannot be had, where there are any sinful Terms of Communion: and though I assert, that the Church must be founded on a Divine Covenant, I never said, that nothing must be enjoyed by the Church, but what is express'd in that Covenant. A Corporation which is founded upon a Royal Charter, you know, may have Authority to make By-Laws, which shall oblige all the Members of it, and so are Terms of Communion with it; and yet it is the Charter, not these By-Laws, whereon the Corporation is founded. I was not concerned to examine the Terms of Communion, (that is, and will be done by other hands) but, supposing nothing sinful in our Communion, whether all Christians that live in this Church, are not bound to live in Communion with it.

Q. 3. Your next Query concerns the Derivation of Church-Power from Christ himself, without any immediate Derivation from other Church-Governours; which does not at all concern my Doctrine of Church-Communion: for whether it be so or so, still we are bound to maintain Communion with all sound parts of the Catholick Church; so Church-Authority be derived from Christ any way, it is well enough, but then we must be sure that it is so: and if Christ have appointed no ordinary way for this, but by the hands of men, who received their Authority immediately from himself, I know not who can appoint any other way.

But may not a Lay-man preach the Gospel, and gather a Church in a Heathen Country, where there is none of the Clergy to do it? I suppose he may; and if you please to consult the Vindication of the Defence of Dr. *Stillingsfleet's* Unreasonableness of Separation, p. 331, &c. you will find this case largely debated.

But it seems it doth not satisfy you, that this be allowed onely in case of Necessity, for then up start two other Queries.

1. *Whether this will not put the being of our Church upon a very hazardous issue, and oblige your self to prove, that it was a true Church before the Reformation?*

Ansiv. This is no hazard at all: for the Church of England was certainly a true, though a corrupt Church, before the Reformation, as the Church of Rome is at this day. A true Church is that which has every thing essential to the being of a Church, though mixt with such other corruptions, as make its Commu-

Vindicat.
p. 64. &c.

nion dangerous and sinful, as a diseased man is a true man ; and remove these corruptions, and then it is not onely a true, but a sound Church, as the Church of *England* is at this day. And if you will not allow this, I doubt, Sir, all private Christians will be at as great a loss for their Baptism, as the Church will be for Orders. But the case of a True and Sound and Catholick Church, if you please, you may see stated in the same Book to which I referred you before.

And thus your second Query is answered, that though this Church was Antichristian before the Reformation, yet there was not the same necessity for private Christians to usurp the Ministerial Office, without a regular Authority, as there is for a Layman in a Heathen Nation, because an Antichristian, that is, the most corrupt Church, retains the Power of Orders, as well as of Sacraments.

As for that Independent Principle, that Christ has instituted a Power in the Church to ordain her own Officers, you may see it examined in the Defence of *Dr. Still. Vnr. of Sep.* p. 306, &c.

But what now is all this to me ? I don't charge our Dissenters with Schism from the Invalidity of their Orders, but for their causeless and sinful Separation. Let us suppose, that they have no need of any Orders, or that such Orders as they have are good, or that they had Episcopal Orders, and were governed by Bishops of their own, as the Donatists were, yet they would be never the less Schismatics for that, while they separate from the Church of *England*, and from each other. If Orders be necessary, and they have no Orders, then they are no Churches at all ; if they have true Orders, and are true Churches, but yet divide Christian Communion by separating from any sound part of the Christian Church, they are Schismatics.

4. Q. *Whether from the Supposition, that there ought to be but one Church-Covenant throughout the Catholick Church, that there cannot be one true Church within another, and that the nature of Catholick-Communion is such, that one ought to be ready to Communicate with any sound Church, from which one is not hindered by reason of the distance of place ? it does not follow.*

Ans. Fair and softly ! Let us first consider the Suppositions, before we consider what follows from them ; for you have so mis-represented, so curtailed these Propositions, and so mixt and blended things of a different nature, that it is necessary to restore them to their true Sense and proper Place again, before we can tell what follows.

I asserted, that the Christian Church is founded upon a Divine Covenant, and since God hath made but one Covenant with mankind in Christ Jesus, therefore there can be but one Christian Church throughout the World, founded on this one Covenant. *Resol. of Cases, p. 8.*

Having explained the general notion of Church-Communion, which signifies no more than Church-Fellowship and Society, that to be in Communion with the Church, is to be a Member of the Church, I came to enquire what made a Separate Church. For if there be but one Church, and one Communion, of which all true Christians and Christian Churches are or ought to be Members, then those Churches which are not Members of each other, are Separate Churches. And for a fuller explication of this, I observed several things. *p. 10. p. 19. p. 20.*

1. That there must be but one Church in one place. Because there is no other Rule of Catholick-Communion, but to Communicate in all Religious Offices, and all Acts of Government and Discipline, with those Christians with whom they live. For to Renounce the Ordinary Communion of Christians, or true Christian Church, is to divide the Unity and Communion of the Church; and to withdraw our selves from Ordinary Communion with the Church in which we live, into distinct and separate Societies for Worship, is to Renounce their Communion, and when there is not a necessary cause for it, is a Schismatical Separation. *p. 21.*

And a little after, I added, If all Christians are Members of the one Body of Christ, nothing can justify the distinction of Christians into several Churches, but onely such a distance of place, as makes it necessary and expedient to put them under the Conduct and Government of several Bishops, for the greater Edification of the Church in the more easie and regular Administration of Discipline. And therefore nothing can justify the gathering a Church out of a Church, and dividing Neighbour-Christians into distinct Communion. Now then let us consider what follows.

1. You say, Either that the French Protestants have no Church here, but are Schismaticks in not Communicating with ours; Or that ours is guilty of Schism, in making the Terms of Communion so streight, that it is not the Duty of every one (though a Licensed Stranger) to Communicate with this Church.

Ansiv. If any Foreign Church among us, which by Royal Favour is allowed the Observation of their own Discipline and Rules of Worship, Renounce Communion with the Church of England, or Communicate with our Separatists, she is Schismatical her self; as the Protestant Churches in France, Geneva, or

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Holland would be, should they do the like. But if there be any reason to allow those Foreigners, which are among us, to Form and Model their Congregations according to the Rules of their own Churches to which they originally belong, this is no more a Schism, than there is between the Protestant Churches of *France* and *England*, which own each others Communion.

A bare Variety of Rites and Ceremonies makes no Schism between Churches; our Church pretends not to give Laws to other Churches, in such matters, but leaves them to their liberty, as she takes her own: and why an Ecclesiastical Colony may not for great reasons be transplanted into another Church, as well as a Civil Colony into another Kingdom, while they live in Communion with each other, I cannot tell. It is a different thing to gather a Church out of a Church, and to transplant some Members of one Church into another (maintaining the same Communion, though with some peculiar and different usages) with the consent of the Church to which they come.

The case of Strangers and Natives has always been accounted very different, both upon a Religious and Civil account: Every particular National Church has Authority over her own Members, to direct and govern her own Communion, and prescribe the Rules of Worship; but as she does not impose upon other Churches at a distance, so she may allow the same liberty to the Members of such Foreign Churches, when they live within her Jurisdiction, without breach of Communion: for though the Communion of the whole Christian Church is but one, and all true Catholick Churches are Members of each other, yet the Authority and Jurisdiction is different; every Church challenging a peculiar Authority, which it exerciseth in its own Communion; and therefore for the Church of *England* to suffer Foreign Churches to observe their own Customs and Usages, is not to allow of distinct and separate Communions in her own Bowels, (which were Schismatical,) but only to exempt such Congregations of Strangers from her particular Jurisdiction, and to leave them to the Government and Authority of the Church to which they belong.

There was no such thing indeed allowed in the Primitive Church, as distinct Congregations of Foreigners under a different Rule and Government; and it were very desirable, that all Christians who have occasion to live in other Countries, would conform to all the innocent and laudable Customs of the Church
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where they sojourn, which seems most agreeable to Catholick Communion; but yet distinct Congregations of Foreigners, who own the Communion of our Church, though they observe the customs of their own, are not Schismatical, as the Separate Conventicles of Dissenters are.

2. But does it not follow from the obligation to Communicate, or to be ready to Communicate with any true Church where distance does not hinder, that a Member of the Church of England is not obliged to constant Communion with that Church, but may occasionally communicate with the French Church, nay with Dissenters too, if he believes that any of their Congregations is a true Member of the Catholick Church.

Ans. This is a great Mastery of Wit, to turn my own Artillery upon me. I prove the Dissenters to be Schismaticks, because they set up a Church within a Church, whereas there ought to be but one Church and one Communion in one place, every Christian being bound to Communicate with the sound part of the Catholick Church in the place where he lives; for according to the Laws of Catholick Communion, nothing but distance of place can suspend our obligation to actual Communion; Hence you conclude, that we must Communicate with Schismaticks, if there be any among us, or so near to us, that distance does not hinder our Communion. But you should consider, that our obligation to Catholick Communion does equally oblige us to renounce the Communion of Schismaticks whether at home or abroad; and though we should allow them to be true Churches, yet if Schismatical, they are not Catholick Churches, and therefore not the objects of Catholick Communion.

But however, we may lawfully Communicate with the French Church that is among us, as occasion serves. Yes, no doubt we may, because they are in Communion with us. But then follows the Murdering consequence, that a Member of the Church of England is not bound to a constant Communion with her. I pray, why so? every Member, as a Member, is in constant Communion; for to be in Communion with a Church, is to be a Member of it, as I proved at large: but then Church-Communion does not primarily respect a Particular but the Universal Church, and therefore it is no interruption of our Communion with the Church of England to Communicate actually with any Church, which is in Communion with her: for as all Christians, who are neither Hereticks nor Schismaticks, are Members of the Catholick

Resol. of
Casus, p.
10.

p. 13;

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lick Church, so they are in Communion with the Catholick Church, and every sound part of it. The State of Communion is constant with the whole Catholick Church, the acts of Communion are performed sometimes in one part of it, sometimes in another, as our presence, abode, or occasions, require; and thus it is possible actually to Communicate with the French Church, either in *England* or out of *England*, without interrupting our Communion with the Church of *England*; for the Communion is one and the same in all Christian Churches, which are in Communion with each other, though they may observe different Rites and Modes of Worship.

And this I suppose is a Sufficient answer to that other untoward consequence, that if the Members of the Church of *England* may occasionally Communicate with the French Church, *then Constant Communion is not always a Duty, where occasional Communion is lawful*; I suppose, because we are not bound to a constant actual or presential Communion with the French Church, though we may occasionally Communicate with it.

But certainly, Sir, had you ever considered, what I discours'd about constant and occasional Communion, you would not have made such an Objection as this: For this is a Modern distinction, which has no sense at the bottom, as I plainly shew'd. But however, by constant Communion, our Dissenters understand the performing the Acts of Communion, always or ordinarily in the same Church; and by occasional Communion, performing the Acts of Communion sometimes, or as occasion serves, in another Church; now with respect to this Notion of constant, or occasional Communion, as it signifies the constant and ordinary, or the occasional Acts of Communion, must that question be understood, *Whether constant Communion be a Duty, where occasional Communion is Lawful*: the meaning of which question is this, whether when other Reasons and Circumstances determine my Personal Communion ordinarily to one Church, it be not my Duty to Communicate ordinarily with that Church, if I can lawfully Communicate sometimes with it: and there being no other reason to justify non-Communion with any Church with which I am bound for other reasons ordinarily to Communicate, but onely Sinful Terms of Communion, and there being no Colour for such a Pretence, where occasional Communion is acknowledged Lawful, (for Sinful Terms of Communion make occasional as well as constant Acts of Communion

munion Sinful) I hence conclude, that it is a necessary Duty to Communicate constantly or ordinarily with that Church in which I live, if it be Lawful to Communicate occasionally, or sometimes with it.

But if any Man will be so perverse as to understand this question, as you now do, not of the Communion of a Church, which for other reasons we are bound to Communicate ordinarily with, but of any Church with which I may lawfully Communicate as occasion serves, it makes it an absurd and senseless Proposition, to say, that constant Communion (by that meaning presential and personal Communion) is always a duty, where occasional Communion is lawful. For at this rate, if occasional Communion with the Protestant Churches of *France, Geneva, Holland, Germany*, be lawful, it becomes a necessary duty for me to Communicate always personally and presentially with all these Churches at the same time, which no man can do, who can be present but in one place at a time. But yet thus far the Proposition holds universally true, that whatever Church I can occasionally Communicate with, without sin, I am also bound to Communicate constantly with, whenever such reasons as are necessary to determine my Communion to a particular Church, make it my Duty to do so. And no man in his Wits ever understood this Question in any other sense.

But this you think cannot be my meaning: For according to me, *no man is obliged to be a Member of one Sound Church more than another, provided the distance is not so great, but that he may Communicate with both.*

It is wonderful to me, Sir, how you should come to fasten so many absurd Propositions upon me; and I would desire of you for the future, if you have no regard to your own Reputation, yet upon Principles of common Honesty, not to write so hastily, but to take some time to understand a Book, before you undertake to confute it.

Where do I say, *That no man is obliged to be a Member of one Sound Church more than of another?* I assert indeed, that no baptized Christian is a Member of any particular Church, considered merely as particular, but is a Member of the universal Church, and of all sound Orthodox Churches, as parts of the universal Church. This puts him into a State of Communion with the whole Church, without which he cannot be properly said to perform any Act of Church-Communion, though he should joyn in

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all the Acts and Offices of Christian Worship: But is there no difference between being a Member of the Universal Church, and of all particular Churches, which are Parts and Members of the Universal Church, and *not to be obliged to be a Member of one Sound Church more than of another?* The first supposes, that every Christian, whatever particular Church he actually Communicates in, is a Member of the whole Christian Church, and of all particular Sound Churches: the second supposes the quite contrary, that Christians are so Members of one Church, as they are not of another; that constant Communion in a particular Church, confines their Church-Membership to that particular Church in which they Communicate.

So that the question is not, what Church I must be a Member of; for every Christian is a Member of the whole Church, not merely of this or that particular Church; but what particular Church I must Communicate in. Now our Obligation to Communicate in a certain particular Church, results from the place wherein we live: The Church in which we were Born and Baptized, and have our ordinary Abode and Residence, the Church which is incorporated into the State of which we are Natural Subjects, if it be a true and sound Christian Church, challenges our Communion and Obedience.

Now in the same place, there never can be any competition between two Churches, because there must be but one Church in the same place, and therefore there can be no dispute in what Church we must constantly Communicate, which must be the Church in which we live.

But is there not a *French*, and a *Dutch*, as well as an *English* Church, in *London*; and since distance of place does not hinder, may we not chuse which of these we will ordinarily Communicate with?

I answer, No, we have onely the Church of *England* in *England*. The *French* Church is in *France*, and the *Dutch* Church is in *Holland*, though there is a *French* and *Dutch* Congregation allowed in *London*. These Congregations belong to their own Original Churches, and are under their Government and Censures; but there is no Church-Power and Authority in *England*, but onely of the Church of *England*, and therefore though we may occasionally Communicate with the *French* Congregation, our Obligation to constant Communion is with the Church of *England*, which alone has Authority and Jurisdiction in *England*.

to require our Communion and Obedience: one particular Church is distinguish'd from another, not by a distinct and separate Communion, which is Schismatical, but by distinct Power and Jurisdiction; and that Church within whose Jurisdiction we live, can onely challenge our Communion: and I suppose no man will say, that in this sense we live in the *French* or *Dutch* Church, because there is a *French* and *Dutch* Church allowed among us.

5. Your next Query is, *Whether a true Christian, though not visibly admitted into Church-Communion, where he wants the Means, has not a virtual Baptism in the Answer of a good Conscience towards God, according to 1 Pet. 2. 21.*

Ans. What this concerns me, I cannot tell. I speak onely of the Necessity of Visible Communion in Visible Members, you put a question, whether the want of Visible Admission by Baptism, when it can't be had, may not be supplied with the answer of a good Conscience towards God. I hope in some cases it may, though I do not hope this from what *St. Peter* says, who onely speaks of that Answer of a good Conscience, which is made at Baptism, not of that which is made without it. But what God will accept of in this case, is not my business to determine; unbaptized Persons are no Visible Members of the Church, and therefore not capable of Visible Communion, and therefore not concerned at all in this dispute.

6. Query, *Why a profest Atheist, who has been baptized, and out of Secular Interest continues a Communicant with this Church, is more a Member of the Catholick Church, than such as are above described.*

Ans. Neither Atheists nor Schismatics are Members of the Catholick Church. But this is a vile insinuation against the Governours and Government of our Church, as if profest Atheists were admitted to Communion. Though possibly there may be some Atheists, yet I never met yet with one, who would profess himself an Atheist. If I should, I assure you, I would not admit him to Communion, and I hope there is no Minister of the Church of *England* would; and I am sure, no man, who had any kindness for the Church, with which he pretends to hold Communion, would ask such a question.

7. Query, *Whether as the Catholick Church is compared to a Body of Men incorporated by one Charter should upon supposition of a possibility of the forfeiture of the Charter to the whole Body, by the*

Miscarriages of any of the Officers, does it likewise follow, that the Miscarriages of any of the Officers, or the Church Representative, as I remember Bishop Sanderfon calls the Clergie, may forfeit the Priviledges given by Christ to his Church, or at least may suspend them? As, suppose a Protestant Clergie taking their Power to be as large as the Church of Rome claim'd, should deny the Laity the Sacraments, as the Popish did in Venice, and here in King John's time, during the Interdict, quid inde operator?

*Resol. of
Cases, p. 8.
&c.*

Ans. Just as much as this Query does, the reason of which I cannot easily guess. I asserted indeed, that as there is but one Covenant on which the Church is founded, so there can be but one Church to which this Covenant belongs; and therefore those who divide and separate themselves from this one Body of Christ, forfeit their Right to this Covenant, which is made onely with the one Body of Christ; which I illustrated by the instance of a Charter granted to a particular Corporation, which no man had any interest in, who divided himself from that Corporation to which this Charter was granted: But what is this to forfeiting a Charter by the Miscarriages of Officers? I doubt, Sir, your Head has been warmed with Quo Warranto's, which so affect your Fancy, that you can Dream of nothing else.

I was almost afraid, when your hand was in, I should never have seen an end of these Questions; and I know no more reason, why you so soon left off asking Questions, than why you askt any at all: for I would undertake to ask five hundred more, as pertinent to the business as most of these. You have not indeed done yet, but have a reserve of particular Queries; but general Queries are the most formidable things, because it is harder to find what they relate to, than how to answer them.

You have three sets of Queries relating to three several Propositions, besides a parting blow of four Queries relating to my Text.

The first Proposition you are pleased to question me about, is this: *That our Saviour made the Apostles and their Successors Governours of his Church, with promise to be with them to the end of the World.* Which I alledged to prove, that when the Church is called *the Body of Christ*, it does not signifie a confused multitude of Christians, but a regular Society under Order and Government.

Now, Sir, is this true or false? if it be false, then the Church is not a governed Society, is not a Body, but a confused heap and mul-

multitude of Independent Individuals, which is somewhat worse than Independent Churches. If it be true, why do you ask all these Questions, unless you have a mind to confute our Saviour, and burlesque his Institutions? But since I am condemned to answer Questions, I will briefly consider them.

1. *Whether our Saviour's promise of Divine Assistance, did not extend to all the Members of the Church, considering every man in his respective Station and Capacity, as well as the Apostles, as Church-Governours? For which, you may compare St. John with St. Matthew.*

Ans. No doubt, but there are Promises which relate to the whole Church, and Promises which belong to particular Christians, as well as Promises which relate peculiarly to the Apostles and Governours of the Church, in the exercise of their Ministerial Office and Authority: but what then? Christ is with his Church, with his Ministers, with particular Christians, to the end of the World, but in a different manner, and to different purposes; and yet that Promise there, is peculiarly made to the Apostles, including their Successors also: for the Apostles themselves were not to continue here to the end of the World, but an Apostolical Ministry was.

2. *Therefore Query, Whether it signifies any thing to say, there is no Promise to particular Churches, provided there be so particular Persons, such as are in charity with all men, and are ready to communicate with any Church, which requires no more of them than what they conceive to be their Duty; according to the Divine Covenant?*

Ans. It seems to me to be a harder Query, what this Query means; or how it concerns that Authority which our Saviour has given to his Apostles for the Government of the Church; to which this Query relates. I asserted, indeed, that Christ hath made no Covenant with any particular, but only with the Universal Church, which includes particulars as Members of it; nor has he made any Promise to particular Persons, but as Members of the Church, and in Communion with it, when it may be had upon lawful terms. Whoever breaks the Communion of the Church, without necessary reason, though he may in other things be a very good-natur'd man, yet he has not true Christian Charity, which unites all the Members of the same Body in one Communion; and though the Church may prescribe Rules of Worship, which are not expressed in the Divine Covenant, this will not justify a Separation, if she commands nothing

which is forbid : for the very Authority Christ has committed to his Ministers, requires our obedience to them in things lawful; and if men will adhere to their own private Fancies in opposition to Church-Authority, they are guilty of Schism, and had best consider, whether such pride and opinionativeness will be allowed for excuse.

3. *Whether if the Promise you mention be confined to the Apostles, as Church-Governours, it will not exclude the Civil Power.*

Ans. There are peculiar Promises made to Church-Governours, and to Civil Magistrates; their Authority and Power is very distinct, but very consistent.

4. *What was the extent of the Promise, whether it was to secure the whole Church, that its Governours should never impose unlawful Terms of Communion, or that there never be a defection of all the Members of the Catholick Church, but that there should always be some true Members.*

Ans. The Promise is, that Christ will be with them in the discharge of their Ministry, and exercise of their Power; and this is all I know of the matter: Our Saviour gave them Authority to Govern the Church, and this was to last to the end of the World, as long as there is any Church on Earth, which is all I cited it for, and so much it certainly proves.

The second Proposition you raise Queries on, is this: *'Tis absurd to gather a Church out of a Church of Baptized Christians.*

This I do indeed assert, that since the Church is founded on a Divine Covenant; and to be in Covenant with God, and to be Members of his Church, is the same thing: therefore Baptism, whereby we are received into Covenant with God, makes us Members of the Church also. And this makes it very absurd, to gather a Church out of Churches of Baptized Christians, which supposes that they were not a Church before. Instead of considering the reason whereon this is founded, as every honest Writer should do, you onely put a perverse Comment on it.

By which (say you) I suppose you mean, That men ought not to separate from such, and live in a distinct Church-Communion from any Church of Baptized Christians; which I conceive needs explaining. But if this were true, it were plain enough; but the fault is, that it is not true: for we may separate from any Church of Baptized Christians, if their Communion be sinful; which justifies a Separation from the Church of Rome, and answers your two first Queries.

But indeed the Proposition, as asserted by me, does not so much as concern a Separation from a Church, let the cause be what it will, just or unjust. For the Independents, who are the men for gathering Churches, do not own, that they separate from any Church, but that they form themselves into a Church-State, which they had not before, and which no Christians, according to their Principle, have, who are not Members of Independent Churches. Baptism, they acknowledge, makes men Christians at large, but not Church-Members; which I shewed must needs be very absurd, if the Church be a Body and Society of men founded on a Divine Covenant: for then Baptism, which admits us into Covenant with God, makes us Members of the Church; and they may as well rebaptize Christians, as form them into new Church-Societies.

This I suppose may satisfy you, how impertinent all your Queries are under this head.

Your two first concern the Separation from the Church of Rome, which was not made upon Independent Principles, because they were no Church, but because they were a corrupt Church.

3. *Whether every Bishoprick in England be not so many Churches within the National.* *Ans.* Every Bishoprick is a distinct Episcopal Church, and the Union of them in one National Communion, makes them not so many Churches, within a National, but one National Church; which you may see explained at large in the Defence of Dr. Stillingfleet's Vindication of Separation.

4. And therefore Independent and Presbyterian Churches are indeed within the National (Churches within a Church, which is Schismatical) but not one National Church, as Bishopricks are.

5. And therefore though we should allow them to have the External Form and all Essentials of a Church (which is a very liberal grant) yet they are not in Catholick Communion, because they are Schismaticks.

6. And this is all I am to account for, that they are not in Visible Communion with that one Church and Body of Christ to which the promises are made. But what allowances Christ will make for the mistakes of honest well-meaning Men, who divide the Communion of the Church, I cannot determine. I can hope as charitably as any man, but I dare not be so charitable, as to make Church-Communion an indifferent thing, which is the great Bond of Christian Charity.

3dly. You take occasion for your next Queries, from what I say of the Independent Church-Covenant; you say, *I suppose that the Independents exclude themselves from Catholick-Communion, by requiring of their Members a new Contract, no part of the Baptismal Vow.*

*Resolut.
of Cases,
p. 10. 32.*

I prove indeed from their placing a Church-State in a particular explicate Covenant between Pastor and People, that they separate themselves from the whole Body of Christians: for no other Christians, which are not in Covenant with them, are Members of their Church, nor can they be Members of any other Church. And I proved, that those are Separate Churches which are not Members of each other, and do not own each others Members for their own. For the Notion of Church-Communion consists in Church-Membership, and therefore no man is in Communion with that Church of which he is no Member; and if no man can be a Member of a Church, but by such an explicate Independent Covenant, then he is a Member of no Church but that with which he is in Covenant, and consequently is in Communion with no Church, but that particular Independent Congregation of which he is a Member by a particular Covenant. And if those be Schismaticks and Schismatical Churches, which are not in Communion with each other, then all Independents must be Schismaticks, for they are in Communion with none but their own Independent Congregations. Let us now hear your Queries.

Q. 1. Whether any Obstacle to Catholick-Communion brought in by men, may not be a means of depriving men of it, as well as Covenant or Contract?

Ans. Yes it may, but with this material difference: Other things hinder Communion as sinful terms of Communion, this Independent Covenant in its own nature shuts up, encloses, and breaks Christian Communion into as many Separate Churches and Communions, as there are Independent Congregations. Sinful Terms of Communion, are a just cause of Separation; an Independent Church-Covenant, is a State of Separation in its own nature. The Communion of the Church may be restored by removing those sinful Terms of Communion, but there can be no Catholick Unity or Communion in the Church under Independency.

Q. 2. If it may, which I suppose you will not deny, will you not then, upon this account, make the Church you live in, more guilty than the

the Independents? Baptism, you own, is the only thing which admits into the Catholick Church; but they require no new Covenant at Baptism, Ergo, they admit into the Church, without any clog or hindrance of humane Inventions.

Ans. Pray what comparison is there between the Church of England and Independency? Whatever fault the Church of England may be charged with, as to its Rites and Ceremonies, (which I will not now dispute with you) yet all this is capable of a Remedy; she may give occasion to Schism, if she imposes any unlawful or sinful Terms of Communion, but yet the Frame and essential Constitution of the Church, is not Schismatical; but Independency is Schism in the very notion of it, and an Independent Conventicle is never capable of becoming a Member of the Catholick Church.

But you say, *I own that Baptism is the only thing which admits into the Catholick Church, i. e. which makes us Members of the Universal Church, and all sound parts of it, and that nothing else is necessary to make a Church-Member.* Very right! I do own this; but what is my owning this, to the Independents? For they do not, and will not own it; they admit into their Churches, not by Baptism, but by a Humane and Voluntary Covenant, and will own none for Church-Members but such. Baptism at most gives men only a disposition to be Church-Members, but does not make them Members of any Church.

But they require no new Covenant at Baptism, ergo, they admit into the Church without any clog or hindrance of humane Invention, that is, they admit to Baptism without any new Covenant: because Baptism does not, as they believe, admit into the Church, ergo, they admit into the Church without any clog of humane Invention. And yet, Sir, I perceive you do not understand this matter neither: for though what their Practice is now, I cannot tell, yet according to their Principles and former Practice, though they required no new Covenant of the Child to be baptized, yet they would baptize no Children, but of such Parents as were in Church-Covenant with them, which is the same thing; and a much greater clog to Baptism, than the Signe of the Crosse, which when I know your Exceptions against, I will consider them.

And now, Sir, nothing remains of your First Letter, but some few Queries relating to the meaning of my Text. Your three first Queries come onely to this, whether every particular Church may,

A Letter to Anonymus.

may not be called the Body of Christ. I answer, no doubt but it may, and yet Christ has but one Body, and all the sound Churches in the World are but one Body, and must be but one Communion. As you may see proved at large in the Defence of Dr. Still, and the Vindication of that Defence, and thither I refer you. But what you mean by Christs *Metaphorical Body*, I confess, I cannot tell, and therefore cannot answer that Question.

Your Fourth Query, concerns the nature of Schism, which you would not have consist in dividing Communion through difference of Opinions, but through want of Charity, because the Apostle says, that the Members have the same care one of another. Now methinks in the natural Body, should the Members divide from each other, though they should pretend to love one another dearly, they would not be thought to have such care of one another, as the Members of the same Body ought to have. The application is easie, and you may find this matter plainly stated in the Defence to which I have so often referred you.

Thus Sir I have honestly answered all your Queries, which you sent me in your first Letter, and which you challenge me, and conjure me as a Protestant Divine to answer *Categorically* in your Second; whether they were so very considerable as to deserve either to be Printed or Answered, I leave the Reader to consider.

Your Second Letter, though it be somewhat peevish, yet creates me but little trouble. It has brought forth but one Query, and half of that is already Answered.

Whether, if the nature of Catholick Communion requires a readiness to Communicate with any sound Church, and yet a Church obliges us to Communicate with that alone, while distance does not binder the occasional and frequent Communion with others, is not that Church guilty of Schism in such an Injunction contrary to the nature of Catholick Communion?

Ans. No Church can be so supposed to forbid Communion with any Church, which is in Communion with her: and as for Schismatical Conventicles, which you are pleased to call sound Churches, it is the duty of the Church to forbid all Communion with them, how near soever they be. For Catholick Communion obliges us only to Communicate in the Catholick Church, from whence Schismatics have withdrawn and separated themselves; and whoever Communicates with Schismatics, is in so doing a Schismatick.

Or

Or at least, (as you proceed) is it not impossible, that he who Communicates sometimes with one true Church, sometimes with another, can be a Schismatick, or any more than an Offender against a positive humane Law ?

Ans. If such true Churches be Schismatical, he that Communicates with a Schismatical Church, is guilty of a Schismatical Act; and how is it possible it should be otherwise ? Should a man sometimes joyn with his Princes Forces, and sometimes with his Enemies, and fight sometimes on the one side, and sometimes on the other, were he a Rebel or not ? To be sure he is a Rebel when he fights against his Prince, though sometimes he fight for him. We may, and ought, as occasion serves, to Communicate with any Church which is in Catholick Communion; but where there are two opposite and separate Communions, to Communicate with both, is like taking part on both sides; and if one be in the right, and the other in the wrong, such a man cannot be in the right always.

Well, but however, he is no Schismatick, but only an Offender against a positive humane Law. Yes, certainly he is a Schismatick, and an Offender, not merely against humane positive Laws, but against the Unity of the Church, and the Evangelical Laws of Catholick Communion.

But this mention of Law puts me in mind of a passage or two at the beginning of your Preface. You say, *Perhaps it's not absurdity to suppose, that men may as well continue Members of the National Church, notwithstanding their breaking many positive Laws, made for the outward management and ordering of it, though not fundamental and necessary to its being; as he who incurs the penalty of any Statute of the Realm about Civil affairs, may however be a sound Member of the State, if he keep from Treason and other Capital Crimes.*

Very right, Sir ! While men continue in the Communion of the Church, they are Church-Members, though they may be irregular, and guilty of some Acts of Disobedience; but methinks it is a little absurd to say, that those continue Members of the Church, who separate from it: Schism and Separation from the Church, is just what Treason and Rebellion is in the State, and such persons, by your own confession, cease to be sound Members.

You adde, *Nay possibly, that there should be several Religious Assemblies, living by different Customs and Rules, and yet continuing*

Members of the National Church, is not more inconsistent, than, that particular places should have their particular Customs and By-Laws, differing from the Common Law of the Land, without making a distinct Government.

Answer. Whatever variety and difference in the Rules of Worship in several Congregations, is consistent with one Communion, may be granted, when the prudence of Governours sees it fit and expedient. But Mr. *Humphry's* Project, which I perceive you are nibbling at, of making a National Church by an Act of Parliament, which should declare Presbyterians, Independents, &c. to be Parts of the National Church, is certainly the cunningest way of curing Schism that ever was thought on: but you may find that expedient for Union at large considered in the Vindication of the Defence of Dr. *Still*.

And thus, Sir, I proceed to your third Letter, and here you run nothing but Dregs and Lees; and I hope you will not think it any neglect of you, if I do not answer you Paragraph by Paragraph, as I have done your first Letter, there being little new in this, but onely a Repetition of your old Queries: and though you know Repetitions are very convenient to lengthen a Sermon, there is no need of such Arts to lengthen this Answer, which is too long already.

Letter 3.
P. 16. Your first Charge upon me is, that I onely amuse People with Equivocal Words and Terms: that I play with the words, *Church* and *Schism*; which had been no fault, had I played the right way with them, that is, had I ridiculed them, as you do, who think them words onely fit to be played with, who have found out a Church without any Government, which is, onely an *Intrigue* between Clergie-men on all sides, who will not allow causeless Separation from a sound part of the *Catholic Church*, to be Schism, but place Schism wholly in want of Charity, and make it nothing else but some Divisions and Contentions between the Members of the same Church, who still live in Communion with one another; a true Independent Notion to justify causeless Separations. Divisions in the Church are certainly very sinful, and a degree of Schism, as unnatural, as if the Members of the same Body should fight with each other, while they are United to the same Body; but to divide from the same Body, is the perfection of Schism, unless a Quarrel be a Rent and Schism, but Separation be none.

You desire me to define what I mean by a Church, when considered

sidered as Catholick and Universal, and when taken in a more restrained sense. But this, I think I have done already, if you had eyes to see it; and you may find it done more largely in the Defence of Dr. Still. But would not any man, who had ever seen this Discourse, which you undertake to confute, wonder to hear you ask me, *Whether a man has a right to be of a particular Church as he is a Christian*; when the whole designe of that Tract is to prove, that every Christian by being so, is a Member of the Catholick Church, and has a right to Communicate with all sound parts of the Catholick Church, and bound to Communicate with that part of it in which he lives? P. 18.

In the next place, you attempt to prove, that the Influences and Operations of the Holy Spirit, are not confined to the Visible, but Invisible Church: but not to examine your proof of it, which is nothing to the purpose, you may consider, that the Visible and Invisible Church on Earth, are not two, but one Church; not that every Member of the Visible Church is a Member also of the Invisible, that is, every profess Christian is not a true Believer; but whoever is not a Member of the Visible Church, and does not live in Communion with it, when it may be had, is not, that we know of, a Member of the Invisible Church. p. 19.

We have no way to prove, that any man is a Member of the Invisible, who is not a Member of the Visible Church; and what we do not, and cannot know, does not concern us; secret things belong to God, and with him it becomes us to leave them. But this also you may find more largely discount in the Vindication of the Defence.

You urge the case of Pope Victor, who, as you say, in a Council or full Representative of that Church, excommunicated the poor Arians upon the Paschal Controversie. And that each Church was far enough from owning each others Members for their own—What should the poor Lay-Christians do in this divided State? could they not Communicate with both, or either, without danger of Schism themselves? p. 21.

Ans. It is an easie matter to put hard Cases, almost about any thing; and if a particular hard Case, which either may possibly happen, or has sometimes happened, is sufficient to overthrow a standing and general Rule, and to confute the most plain and convincing Evidence for it, there is nothing in Religion can be firm and Able. In the very same manner men dispute against the Being of a God, and a Providence, against the necessity

of Baptism, and the Lords Supper, against the Apostolical Power and Ministry, and all Church-Government, against the necessity of believing many fundamental Articles of our Faith, because many, otherwise very good men, from the Power and Prejudice of Education, or through weakness of understanding, may be guilty of some damnable Heresies.

But must there be no standing Laws or Rules, because there may happen some hard and difficult Cases? Does not humane Power make Provision against such Cases by Courts of Chancery, or the Prerogative of the Prince, and yet maintain the Authority and Sacredness of Laws? And will we not allow God himself a Power of Dispensing with Laws in hard Cases, without destroying the Authority of his Laws? Is not Church-Communion a necessary Duty, because it may so happen, that sometimes I cannot Communicate with any Church? Is not Schism a very grievous and damning sin, because it may happen, that men may be unavoidably, innocently, and without a Schismatical mind, engaged in a Schism.

I have evidently proved the necessity of Church-Unity and Communion, and the evil and danger of Schism; and if you can answer the Scripture-Evidence produced in this Cause, I will carefully consider it; but it is no confutation of a plain Law, to urge hard Cases against it, which will overthrow all Laws that ever were made. If you imagine, or can produce any real Case, wherein it is almost impossible for the Persons concerned to know, that they are guilty of Schism, or to discover on which side the Schism lies, or to avoid it without renouncing all Communion with the Church, which course soever they take, I leave all such Cases to God, who knows when it is fit to dispence with his own Laws; and will take care of my own Duty according to Scripture-Rules, and not hope to justify the ordinary breach of known Laws, by some extraordinary Cases.

And yet the Case which you propose, is not so unanswerable a difficulty, as you imagine. Several Councils in *Palestine*, in *Rome*, in *Pontus*, and other places, determine the Celebration of *Easter* on the day of the Resurrection, not on the Fourteenth Day of the Month, which was the Jewish Passover, (which dispute you call a *Mistake in Arithmetick*, but for what reason I know not) the Bishops of *Asia* at the same time decree the observation of *Easter* on the Fourteenth Day, whatever Day of the Week it fell on, according to the ancient Observation of the *A-*

Asian

*Euseb. b. 5.
cap. 23.*

Asian Churches. Pope *Victor* upon this, writes to several Bishops very bitterly against them, and was very desirous to have them Excommunicated, and did as much as in him lay, denounce the Sentence against them. cap. 24.

But this was ill resented by other Bishops in Communion with him; and particularly *Irenæus* wrote a Letter to him about it, and earnestly dissuades him from it, & did prevent it from taking effect, if we will believe *Eusebius*. So far is it from being true, as you assert, that Pope *Victor* in a Council Excommunicated the poor *Asians*; what he did, was onely his own Act, which was displeasing to other Bishops, and which he was forc'd to undo. So that here was a great deal of Heat and Warmth, and tendency towards a Schism, but no Schism followed upon it, among the Catholick Churches.

But suppose Pope *Victor* had Excommunicated the *Asian* Churches, and this Excommunication had taken effect, this could not make the *Asian* Churches Schismatics: for there is a great deal of difference between being cast out of the Communion of a Church, and forsaking the Communion of a Church. The first is matter of censure, the second is our own choice; the first is an Ecclesiastical Punishment, the second, when it is causeless, is Schism.

So that had the Church of *Rome* Excommunicated the *Asian* Churches, unless the *Asian* Churches upon this, had made a separation from the Church of *Rome*, this Excommunication could not make them Schismatics; and therefore any one might safely Communicate with them, without partaking in a Schism.

Nor was it a just reason for the *Asian* Churches to have renounced the Communion of the Church of *Rome*, though they had been Excommunicated by *Victor*: for this had been to do as ill a thing as *Victor* had done, for no other reason, but because Pope *Victor* had set them an Example. And therefore we find *St. Cyprian* of another temper, when he and the *African* Bishops were threatned in the same manner by Pope *Stephen*, upon occasion of that warm Dispute about rebaptizing Hereticks. At that very time, in his Epistle to *Jubaianus*, he declares his resolution, not to break Communion with any Church or Bishops upon that account, and therefore not with Pope *Stephen* himself, notwithstanding his rash and furious Censures. And concludes, that Patience and forbearance was the best Remedy in such cases, and therefore upon this occasion, he says, he wrote his Book *de bono Patientia*. Well,

Well, but if the Asiatick Churches were not Schismaticks, yet Pope *Victor* had been a Schismatick, had he Excommunicated the Churches of *Asia*, or withdrawn Communion from them. And this had made the case of the *Roman* Christians very hard: for they must either have suspended Communion with both these divided Churches, and lived without the comfort and advantages of Christian Communion; or they must have rejected the Communion of their own Bishop and Churches, or have rejected the Communion of the Churches of *Asia*, or have maintained Communion with them both, that is, with two Separate Churches, which according to my Principles, is to Communicate in a Schism. If they Communicate with their own Schismatical Bishop, this is to Communicate in a Schism, by Communicating with a Schismatick; if they renounce his Communion, when he imposes no new unlawful Terms of Communion upon them, this is to separate from a sound and Orthodox Church, for the sake of a Schismatical Bishop. If they Communicate with the Churches of *Asia*, this is to break Communion with their own Bishop, who has Excommunicated them; if they separate from the Churches of *Asia* for no other reason, but because they are unjustly Excommunicated, this is to separate for an unjust cause, which is a Schism; if they Communicate with both, they Communicate with two separate Churches, and therefore must be Schismaticks on one side or other. If you can find any more difficulties in this matter, you may. And yet after all this, I do believe the Christians of *Rome* might have Communicated both with the *Roman* and *Asian* Churches, without Schism; and this I believe upon these Principles, which I shall briefly explain, and confirm.

1. That the personal miscarriage of the Bishop in the exercise of Ecclesiastical Censures, cannot involve his whole Church in the guilt of Schism, though it may make him a Schismatick: and certainly since Bishops are but men, and subject to the like passions and infirmities that other men are, it would be a very hard case, if his personal Schism should be imputed to the whole Church.

Though the Bishop have the chief Authority in the Church, yet it is hard to say, that every abuse of his Authority is the Act of the whole Church; and therefore the Church may not be Schismatical, when the Bishop is: and it is possible to Communicate with a Church whose Bishop is a Schismatick, without Commu-

Communicating in the Schism. And therefore, though *Victor* had schismatically Excommunicated the *Asian* Churches, the Christians of *Rome* at that time might have Communicated with the Church of *Rome*, without partaking in *Victor's* Schism.

For, though a particular Church-Society consists in that Relation which is between the Bishop and his Clergy and People, yet it is possible that the Bishop in the exercise of his Authority may violate the Fundamental Laws of Communion, on which the Christians of such a Church unite into one Body and Society: and when he does so, it being an abuse of his Episcopal Authority, it is his personal fault, which cannot affect the whole Church.

The case is very plain, where there is an Established Constitution in a Church (as it is in the Church of *England*) which obliges the Bishops as well as People. For should any *English* Bishop require any thing of his Clergy or People, which is contrary to the Established Laws and Canons of the Church, or should exercise any Authority in Censures and Excommunications, which is not allowed him by those Canons, this can in no sense be called the Act of the Church, nor is any one bound to obey him in it; and though such a Bishop should do any schismatical Act, the Church is not schismatical, because he did not pursue the Laws of the Church in what he did, but gratified his own Humour and Passion. If the Church indeed unites upon schismatical Principles, as the *Novatians* and *Donatists* did, whatever the Bishops do in pursuance of such Principles, is the Act of the Church, and if the Bishops be Schismatics, the Church is so too; but when there is nothing schismatical in the Constitution of the Church, the personal Schism of Bishops cannot make their Churches schismatical.

And though the Primitive Churches, before the Empire turned Christian, had not such a Firm and Legal Constitution, as the Church of *England* now has, yet a Constitution they had, which consisted either of Apostolical Rules handed down by Tradition, and confirmed by long custom and usage, or the Canons of particular Councils, which in ordinary cases made standing Laws of Discipline and Government, and in extraordinary cases provided for new Emergent difficulties; and antecedently to all these positive Constitutions, they were all under the obligation of that great Law of Catholick Communion. So that the Government of the Church, since the Apostles days was never so intirely in the Bishops breast, that what he did, should be thought the Act of

of the Church, any farther than as he complied with those Laws, by which the Church was to be governed: and therefore there was reason in those days to distinguish between the Act of the Bishop and the Act of the Church.

As to shew you this particularly in the case before us. The Church of *Rome* from the time of the Apostles had observed *Easter* on the day of the Resurrection, which is the first day of the week, or the Lords day, the *Asian* Churches on the 14th day of the Month; and therefore the Bishop of *Rome*, according to the Laws of that Church, might require all the Members of his Church, to observe *Easter* according to the usage of the Church of *Rome*, and might regularly inflict Church-Censures upon the obdurate and refractory; and this would be accounted the Act of the Church, because it was in pursuance of the Laws and Constitutions of it. But there was no Canon, nor Custom in the Church of *Rome*, to deny Communion to Foreign Churches, who observed their own Customs in this matter, and would not conform to the custom of the Church of *Rome*. Nay, there was the Practice and Example of former times against it; for *Anicetus* Bishop of *Rome* received *Polyearp*, an *Asian* Bishop to Communion, though they could not agree about this matter. And therefore when *Victor* Schismatically Excommunicated the *Asian* Churches for this different observation of *Easter*, it was his Personal Act, not the Act of the Church of *Rome*, which had no such Law, and owned no such Custom: and therefore though this might make Pope *Victor* a Schismatick, it could not make the Church of *Rome* Schismatical; the guilt went no farther than *Victors* Person, unless other Persons voluntarily made themselves guilty, by abetting and espousing the Quarrel.

So that had *Victor* persisted in his Excommunication of the *Asiatick* Churches, none had been guilty of Schism but himself, and such as approved and consented to it, but the Body of the Clergy and People, who had not consented unto it, had been innocent, and therefore any Catholick peaceable Christian, who lived in *Rome* in those days, might have Communicated with the Church of *Rome* without Schism.

The like may be said of the Quarrels and Controversies of particular Bishops, which have sometimes ended in formal Schisms, and denouncing Excommunication against each other; which cannot make their Churches Schismatical, any further than they take part with their respective Bishops. For this is rather a Personal

sonal Schism and Separation, than a Church Schism; neither of them Separate from the Communion of the Church; under the notion of such a Church, though they Separate from each others Communion upon some personal Quarrels.

This was the case of St. *Chrysostom* and *Epiphanius*; and some other Bishops in those days, which were Catholick Bishops, and maintained Communion with the Catholick Church; but yet Separated from each other, which is a very great fault, as all Contentions and Divisions in the Church are, but has not the Evil and Destructive nature of a Church Schism.

But you will say, can we Communicate with a Church without Communicating with its Bishop? or can we Communicate with a Schismatical Bishop, without Communicating in his Schism?

I answer, yes, we may Communicate with a Schismatical Bishop, without Communicating in his Schism. When Schism is his personal fault, our Communion with him makes us no more guilty of it, than of any other personal fault, our Bishop is guilty of. While we take care to Communicate with him in no Schismatical Act, no Man is bound to forsake the Communion of the Church for the personal faults of his Bishop.

So that the *Roman* Christians might Communicate with the Church of *Rome* without Schism, notwithstanding Pope *Victors* Schismatical Excommunication of the *Asian* Churches. And now the only difficulty that remains is, whether the Christians of *Rome* might have Communicated with the *Asiatick* Churches, notwithstanding *Victor* had Excommunicated them; for if they could not, then they must inevitably partake in *Victors* Schism, if his sentence obliged them to deny Communion to the *Asian* Churches. And in answer to this we may consider.

2. That those who Condemned the Excommunication of the *Asian* Churches, did in so doing own their Communion, which is one way, and the principal way of maintaining Communion, between Churches at a distance, who cannot actually Communicate with each other.

3. That *Victor* being the Bishop of *Rome*, who had the supreme Authority of receiving in, or shutting out of the Communion of that Church, if any Persons of the *Asian* Communion had come to *Rome*, private Christians could not receive them into the Communion of the Church without the Bishops Authority, and therefore could not actually Communicate with them in

A Letter to Anonymus.

the publick Offices of Religion, though they owned their Communion; but this is no more their fault, than the Excommunication of the *Asian Churches* was; they Communicate with their own Church, and would be very glad that the *Asians* that are among them, might be received into Communion, but they have no Authority to do it, and therefore the fault is not theirs; for this is not to renounce the Communion of the *Asian Christians*, but is only a forc'd suspension of Communion.

4. If the Christians of *Rome* should travel into *Asia*, I doubt not, but that they might very lawfully Communicate with the *Asian Churches*, notwithstanding they were Excommunicated by the Bishop of *Rome*. For the Bishop of *Rome* had no just cause to Excommunicate the Bishops and Churches of *Asia*, and therefore the Sentence is void of it self; and the *Roman Christians* when they are in *Asia*, are not under the Authority and Jurisdiction of the Bishop of *Rome*, and therefore must not forbear nor suspend Communion with the *Asian Churches*, unless they will justify this schismatical Excommunication. The Jurisdiction of a particular Bishop, is confined within the bounds of his own Church, and every Christian is subject to the Authority of the Church where he is; and therefore, though the *Roman Christians* at *Rome* cannot receive the excommunicated *Asians* to their Communion, without the Authority of their Bishop, yet when they are in *Asia*, where the Bishop of *Rome* has no Authority over them, they may and ought to joyn themselves to the Communion of the *Asian Churches*, during their abode among them, if the *Asians* would receive them without Commendatory Letters from their Bishop, which they could not have in such a case as this.

Thus, Sir, I have considered the Case you put about Pope *Nicoll's* Excommunicating the *Asian Churches*, which is not a real, but a feigned Case, for there was no actual Schism upon it, as I perceive some body had told you there was. And yet supposing it had been so, I have shewn you how the *Roman* and *Asian Churches* might have maintained Communion with each other, and that the Case of private Christians was not so desperate as you represent it.

Your following Exceptions concerning National Communion, and National Churches, and the possibility that there should be several sound and Orthodox parts of the Church at the same place, have been sufficiently considered already: and you twit me

so often with my Repetitions, that though I find you want very frequent Repetitions to make you understand the plainest sense, yet I will for my Readers sake and my own, correct that fault.

Your attempt to prove Congregational Churches from 1 Cor. P. 24. 14. 23. has been so often answered by the Presbyterian as well as Episcopal Divines, that to save my self the labour of transcribing, I shall refer you to them, and particularly to the Defence of Dr. Still *Unr. of Separ.* p. 392. &c. where you may find this matter largely debated, in answer to Dr. Owen's Original of Churches.

You say, *It is evident that one of these (Separate Churches) must needs be cut off from Christ's Body.* I readily grant it; for Christ has but one Body, which is one Communion: and therefore two Churches which are not in Communion with each other, cannot both belong to the same Body, or the one Catholick Church; but the Church which is the Schismatick, according to the Language of the Primitive times, is out of the Catholick Church, *extra Ecclesiam foris*, as is discours'd at large in the Vindication of the Defence.

In the next place, you endeavour to make me contradict my self, in talking of *occasional Communion and occasional Membership*, and *different Relations*, when elsewhere I assert, *That the Communion of the Church does not make us Members of any particular Church.* But pray, Sir, where do I assert this? I am sure I assert the quite contrary, that Church-Communion consists in Church-Membership. I say indeed, *That Church-Communion primarily and principally refers to the Universal Church, not to any particular Church or Society of Christians. That a Member is a Member of the whole Body, not merely of any part of it. That Baptism, which is the Sacrament of our Admission into the Covenant of God, and the Communion of the Church, does not make us Members of any particular Church, as such, but of the Universal Church.* And I do as plainly assert, *That every true Catholick Christian is a Member of the Universal Church, and as such, is a Member of every particular Church which is a sound part of the Universal Church.* That no man can properly be said to Communicate with any Church, whatever Acts of Communion he may perform in it, who does not Communicate with it as a Member; and that therefore to talk of *Occasional Communion*, in the sense of our Dissenters, is as absurd as to talk of an *Occasional Membership*. These are the very Principles on which I dispute against those absurd Distinctions of p. 9.

Resoluti
of Cases,
P. 13, 14.

Constant and Occasional Communion, which I confess to be absurd, and a contradiction to all the Principles of Catholick Communion, and therefore you are concerned to answer this absurdity, not I. I have charged this absurdity upon our Occasional Communicants, and let any man take it off that can.

But are you not, Sir, admirably qualified to answer Books, without so much as understanding the general scope and designe of the Book you answer, without knowing what makes for you or against you?

As for your next Question, *How does it appear, that it is necessary to Communion with the Catholick Church, that we must perform the constant Acts of Communion in that part of the Catholick Church where we constantly live?* You ought, instead of asking this Question, to have shewn, that what proofs I have alledged for this, are not conclusive, or do not sufficiently prove the thing; but your Question insinuates, that I have said nothing at all about it, or at least, that you do not know that I have, though it be the principal designe of that discourse; and then I am a very careless Writer, or you a very careless Reader. But the Answer to it, in short, is this: That every Christian is bound to live in Communion with the Catholick Church; no man lives in Communion with the Church, who does not perform the external visible Acts of Communion, when he may do it without sin. The whole Catholick Church being but one Communion, whoever Communicates with any sound part of it, Communicates with the whole; no man can ordinarily Communicate in a Church in which he does not ordinarily live, and therefore if he be bound at all to the external and visible Acts of Communion, he must perform them in the Church wherein he lives; and in so doing, if it be a true Catholick Church, he lives in Communion with the whole Catholick Church.

Ibid.

But you attempt to prove, *That you are not bound to Communicate so much as sometimes with a sound part of the Catholick Church, because you live where there is such an one.*

And this you prove from Mr. Chillingworth's Authority, who says, that if you (speaking to the Papists) require the belief of any Error among the conditions of your Communion, our Obligation to Communion with you ceaseth. Now is not this an admirable proof, that we are not bound to Communicate with a sound part of the Church where we live, because we are not bound to Communicate with an erroneous Church, which imposes the belief
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of her Errors as Terms of Communion? Is not this a wonderful sound Church? And are not you a very subtil Arguer?

You produce another passage of Mr. Chillingworth, by which I cannot tell what you intend to prove, unless it be that there is no need there should be any External or Visible Church-Society, so men do but profess the Faith of Christ; which seems to be the sence of your foregoing Paragraph. But the words are these: *I believe our Saviour, ever since his Ascension, hath had, in some place or other, a Visible true Church on Earth, I mean, a company of men that profess at least so much as was necessary to Salvation; and I believe there will be somewhere or other such a Church to the Worlds end.* This is his Answer to that Popish Question about the perpetuity of the Visible Church; whereby it appears, that this company of men he speaks of, are not single and scattered Individuals, which are no Visible Church, but he means a Formed and Visible Church-Society: and his Answer is true, though there were never a sound Church in the World. For a corrupt Church, which retains all the Essentials of Faith and Worship, is a true Visible Church; and this is the meaning of Mr. Chillingworth's Answer: But how this proves, that there is no need there should be any Visible Church at all, or that Christians are not bound to actual Communion with the sound and Orthodox Church wherein they live, is past my understanding.

At the same rate you defend your self against me in your Preface, by the Authority of those two excellent Persons, the Dean of Canterbury, and the Dean of St. Pauls. Dr. Stillingfleet had asserted, *That all things necessary to Salvation, are plain in Scripture, to all that sincerely endeavour to understand them; hence S. C. infers, That the Governours of our Church have no Authority to teach Truth, or to condemn Errors, and all the People are become Prophets, and all their Articles, Constitutions, and Ordinances, have been composed and enjoyed by an usurped Authority; and if he had added, as he might have done with the same reason, and all Church-Communion is needless, it had been exactly what you aim at in this Citation. The Doctor vindicates his Doctrine from such a wild Fanatical inference. 1. By shewing the intention of those Principles, which was plainly to lay down the Foundations of a Christian Faith, living in the Communion of our Church. And if this was his designe, as he says it was, certainly he could neither before nor after, say any thing which should overthrow the necessity of Church-Communion; and then he can say nothing against me,*

*Answer to
several
Treatises,
p. 272, &c.*

p. 275.

p. 275.

me, nor for you. 2. He distinguishes between *the necessities to Salvation, and to the Government of the Church*: that is, what is necessary for every Christian, considered in a private Capacity to know and believe, to make him capable of Salvation; and what care the Church must take *to instruct the ignorant, to satisfy the doubting, to direct the unskilful, and to help the weak; and not barely to provide for necessity, but safety; and not barely the safety of particular persons, but of it self; which cannot be done without prudent Orders, setting the bounds of Mens Employments, &c.* i. e. though it is possible for a private Christian, who lives alone, and has the use of the Bible in a Language which he understands, by diligent and honest inquiries, to find out so much truth as is absolutely necessary to Salvation; yet this does not overthrow the necessity of a settled Ministry, and a regular Authority in the Church: All this I firmly assent to, and yet do as firmly believe the necessity of Church-Communion, when it may be had upon lawful Terms, and so does this Reverend Person also; and therefore I cannot look upon your aheadging his Authority against me, to have any other design than to affront the Dean for his excellent Pains in vindicating the Communion of our Church, and shewing People the Evil and Danger of Separation. He has sufficiently declared what his Judgement is about Separation, and therefore I need not concern my self any farther to prove that he is not my Adversary in this Cause.

Preface.

At the same rate you deal with that Great Man (as you deservedly call him) Dr. Tillotson, who says, *I had much rather persuade any one to be a good man, than to be of any Party and denomination of Christians whatsoever: for I doubt not but the belief of the Antient Creed, provided we entertain nothing that is destructive of it, together with a good life, will certainly save a man; and without this, no man can have reasonable hopes of Salvation, no not in an Infalible Church, if there were any such to be found in the World.* How does this oppose me, who assert the necessity of Church-Communion? Is the *Catholic Church* then, and the *Communion of Saints*, no part of our Creed? And is not Schism destructive to these great Articles of our Faith? or is Schism, which is the breach of Christian Charity properly so called, (which is the Love and Charity which the Members of the same Body ought to have for each other, and consists in Unity and Communion) consistent with a good Life, if by that we understand an universal goodness, of which Charity is the most vital and essential part?

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But do you indeed think, Sir, that the Dean believes a man may be saved without Communion with any Church, when it may be had without sin? when in the very next Paragraph he so earnestly exhorts them to Communion with the Church of England? I can easily forgive your usage of me, since I find you cannot read the best Books without perverting them, and that you never spare any Mans Reputation to serve your Designs: for your Reproaches and your Commendations are but different ways of abuse, though I confess, I should rather chuse to be reproached by you.

Your last Consideration is, Whether it be a good way to convert Schismatics, to prove, *that Schism is as Damning a sin, as Murder or Adultery.* Truly, Sir, St. Cyprian and St. Austin, and all the ancient Fathers of the Church, thought this a very good way, for they insisted very much upon this Argument; and if men will not forsake their Schism, though the salvation of their Souls be endangered by it, I am apt to think, that no other Arguments will persuade them. And if this be true (as I verily believe it is, and shall believe so, till I see the third Chapter of the Vindication of the Defence of Dr. Still. fairly answered) I think it the greatest Charity in the World, to warn men of it; and if it should prove by their perverseness no Charity to them, it is Charity to my own Soul, and delivers me from the guilt of their Blood, whether such Doctrine preach men into, or out of the Church.

And now for your parting Blow. Certainly if our Church required Conformity to its Rites and Ceremonies, as necessary to Salvation, it could not blame men for dividing from it. Yes certainly, upon such a supposition, the Church could and would blame men for their Separation, though it may be they might not deserve to be blamed: for no doubt, the more necessary the Church judges her Constitutions, the more she will blame Dissenters.

But he, who tells us, or he says nothing, that the divine Spirit confines his Influences and Operations to the Unity of the Church in such Conformity, not onely makes such Conformity necessary to Salvation, but imputes to the Church the Damnation of many Thousands of Souls, who might expect to be saved upon other Terms. That the Divine Spirit confines his Influences (ordinarily) to the Unity of the Church I do assert; but that this is in Conformity to the Church of England, I do not assert. For Conformity to the Church of England, is not Essential to the Unity of the Catho-
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lick Church: for every Church has Authority to prescribe its own Rites and Ceremonies of Worship, in Conformity to the general Rules of the Gospel. And therefore, though the Unity of the Church is necessary to intitle men to the ordinary Influences of Gods Grace, and consequently is necessary to salvation, yet Conformity to the Church of *England* is not necessary to the Unity of the Church, because Christians who live under the Government and Jurisdiction of other Churches, may and do preserve the Unity of the Church without Conformity to the Church of *England*. Obedience indeed, and Subjection to Church-Authority in all lawful things, is necessary to the Unity of the Church, and necessary to salvation, and consequently it is a necessary Duty to conform to all the lawful and innocent Customs of the Church wherein we live; but this does not make the particular Laws of Conformity, which are different in different Churches, to be necessary to salvation, unless you will say the Church has no Authority but onely in things absolutely necessary to salvation; which destroys all the external Order and Discipline of the Church, and charges all the Churches in the World with destroying mens Souls, if any persons be so humerose and peevish as to break Communion with them for such Reasons. But such kind of Cavils as these, you may find answered at large in the Vindication of the Defence; and thither I refer you, if you desire to see any more of it.

Thus, Sir, I have with great patience answered your Questions, not that they needed or deserved any Answer, but that you might not think your self too much despised, nor other weak People think your Questions unanswered. And now I have given you an Answer, I shall take the Confidence to give you a little Ghostly Counsel too, which you need a great deal more than an Answer.

I have not troubled my head to inquire scrupulously who you are, nor do I use to trust Common Fame in such matters: but though I know not you, yet I perceive you know me; and if, as you say, *you have often heard me with great satisfaction, and as you hope not without edifying thereby*, I think it would have become you to have treated me with a little more Civility than you have done, if it be in your Nature to be Civil to a Clergy-man. And I will more for your own sake, than for mine, you had done so: for I thank God I have learnt not onely by the Precepts and Example of my great master, but by frequent Tryals, to go
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through good Report and evil Report, and to bear the most invidious and spiteful Reflections with an equal mind. But as contemptible as a Clergy-man is now, these things will be accounted for another day.

For it is very evident, that you have a great Spight at the whole Order, whatever personal kindness you may have for some men; they are but a *Herd of Clergy-men*, and you know no other use of a Bishop, but to oversee, admonish, and censure those who are *apt to go beyond their due Bounds*. I confess, this way of Railery is grown very fashionable, and I perceive you are resolved to be in the Mode, and to be an accomplished Gentleman; but I never knew a man that was seriously Religious, who durst affront the Servants for their Masters sake.

But you, Sir, are in the very height of the fashion, and think their Office as contemptible, as their Persons generally are thought to be: you hope to be saved without understanding the Notion of Church-Government, as 'tis intreated by Clergy-men of all sides. And I hope you may be saved without understanding a great many other things besides Church-Government, or else I doubt your Salvation may be hazardous.

But this is too plain a Contempt of all Church-Authority: for though the Church of *Rome* has usurpt an unlimited and tyrannical Power under the Notion of Church-Government, yet what has the *Sound Church of England* (as you own it) done? What occasion did I give for this Censure? who have expressly confined the Exercise of Church-Authority to Church-Communion, so receiving in, and putting out of the Church. And if the Church be no Society, I would desire to know what it is; and if it be a Society, how can any Society subsist without Authority in some Persons to receive in and to shut out of the Society? But the truth is, though you pretend to be in Communion with the Church of *England*, you make the Church it self a very needless and insignificant thing: for you know no necessity of Communicating with any Church, you will not allow it to be Schism to separate from the Church, you think it a pretty indifferent thing whether men be baptized or not, or by whom they are baptized. What your Opinion is about the Sacrament of the Lords Supper, I do not know, though if you are consistent with your self, I doubt that is a very indifferent Ceremony too.

Truly to deal plainly with you, I think you have more need to be taught your Catechism, than to set up for a Writer of

Books; and let me in time warn you, what the consequence of this way you are in is likely to be, which is no less than a contempt of all revealed and instituted Religion, and consequently of Christianity. Natural Religion may subsist without any positive Institutions, but revealed Religion never did, and never can: for when God transacts with Mankind in the way of a Visible Covenant, there must be some Visible Ministers, and Visible Sacraments of this Covenant. And when the Evangelical Ministers and Sacraments fall into contempt, men must think meanly of Christianity, and return to what they call natural Religion, which is a Religion without a Priest and without a Sacrifice; which cannot save a sinner, but by uncovenanted Grace and Mercy; which no man can be sure of, and which no man shall find, who rejects a Priest and Sacrifice of Gods providing.

And to convince you of this, you may observe, that the contempt of the Notion of a Church, of the Evangelical Priesthood and Sacraments, is originally owing to *Deists* and *Socinians*, to those who profess to believe in God, and to worship him according to the Laws of natural Religion, but believe nothing at all of Christ; or to those who profess to believe in Christ, but believe him onely to be a meer Man, and a great Reformer of Natural Religion, but make nothing at all of his Priesthood and Sacrifice. If Christ be our great High Priest, and we must hope for salvation onely in vertue of his Sacrifice, There must be some way appointed to apply his Merits and Salvation to us, and this will convince us of the necessity of Church-Communion, and a visible Confederation by Sacraments of divine appointment: But if Christ came onely as a great Prophet, to instruct us more perfectly in the Rules of Vertue, and to give us more certain hopes of a future state, there can be no more necessity of a Church now, than there was in a state of Nature. Christians may associate, if they please, for Acts of publick Worship, and they may break Company, when they please, without any danger; and the Evangelical Sacraments can be onely significant Ceremonies, which may be used or let alone, as every one likes best.

At this rate you every where discourse; and I believe so well of our Dissenters, that though they would be glad to be excused from the guilt of Schism, yet they will not thank you for excusing them upon such Principles as tend to undermine Christianity; and I believe so well of you, that though you affect to talk in
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See *Vindic.*
of the *Def.*
cap. 3.

the modish way, yet you do not understand whither it tends: and I hope this timely Caution may prevent your embracing those Principles, whereon your Conclusions are Naturally Built.

Another thing I would warn you of, is, that these loose Principles of Church-Communion do not tempt you to Schism, and State-Factions, which usually go together. You pretend indeed to be in constant Communion with the Church of *England*; but according to the Principles of your Letters, no Church in the World can have any hold of you, every Man is a Communicant at his own pleasure; who thinks he may part without Sin; And it is much to be suspected, that no Man, who is a hearty lover of the Church of *England*, can make such a Zealous Defence for Dissenters, who has not some private reasons for his Zeal: and when Men are not Endear'd to each other by one Communion, it is to be feared they are linked together by some other Common Interest. Now should you prove a Schismatick, to say no worse, it will not excuse you, how many Fine Questions soever you can ask about it.

And that which will greatly endanger you, is that great Opinion you have of your self: for some men are so wanton as to espouse a Schism or Faction only to shew their Wit in Defending it, and to make themselves considerable by espousing a Party. I will not so much wrong you, as to say that you have shewn any great Wit or Judgment in this Cause; but it is evident to every impartial Man, who reads your Letters, that you have betrayed too great a conceit of both, and that is a great deal the more dangerous of the two; for true Wit and Judgment will secure Men from those mischiefs, which a vain conceit of it betrays them to.

And now Sir, all that I shall add, concerns your way of Writing, which neither becomes a wise Man, nor a fair Disputant; you have not offered any Argument to disprove any one thing I have said, you have no where shewn the weakness of my Arguments to prove what I undertook, but have at all Adventures askt a great many Questions, and generally nothing to the purpose. Now it had been easy to have askt you as many cross Questions, which had been as good an Answer to your Questions, as your Questions are to my Discourse; and thus People might have gazed on us, and have been never the wiser. For to raise a great many difficulties onely tends to Scepticism, and will

will never end a Dispute. I am loth to mind you of the Proverb, because I do not think the application belongs to you; but yet it should make any Man of Wit ashamed of such Methods of Dispute, wherein he may be out-done by a Man of no Wit.

I confess I have with some regret stole time from better Employment to answer your Letters, but do not think my self bound to do so, as often as you think fit to give a publick Challenge. This Controversie, if you had pleased, might have been ended more privately; which had been less trouble to me, though it may be you thought it might have been less glorious to your self, which I presume was your reason of first spreading your Letter in Writing, and then of Printing it. I shall not envy your Glory; I had rather continue mean and obscure in a humble Obedience to Church and State, than to raise the most Glorious Triumphs and Trophees to my memory, by giving the least disturbance to either. And that you and all sober Christians may be of the same mind, is the hearty Prayer of,

SIR,

Your very Humble Servant,

W. S.

FINIS.

